

# Child Welfare League of America

## Alcohol and Other Drugs Abuse: A Critical Child Welfare Issue

### Scope of Problem

- The actual prevalence of substance abuse and its impact on families is not really known. An estimated 8.3 million U.S. children live with at least one parent who is alcoholic or in need of substance abuse treatment. <sup>1</sup>
- Reports of child abuse and neglect have increased dramatically over the past decade, and have been directly related to illicit drug and alcohol use among parents. From 1986 to 1997, the number of reported abused and neglected cases jumped from 1.4 million to 3 million. <sup>2</sup>
- In a 1997 Child Welfare League of America survey, eighty-five percent of states reported that parental substance abuse and poverty are the top problems in child protective caseload. <sup>3</sup>
- Parental substance use has been identified as a major factor in at least 50% of all child welfare cases, in some parts of the United States, prevalence may be as high as 90%. <sup>4</sup>
- Children whose families do not receive appropriate treatment for alcohol and other drugs abuse are more likely to remain in foster care longer and reenter once they have returned home. Their siblings are also more likely to end up in foster care. <sup>5</sup>
- Children with open child welfare cases whose parents have substance abuse problems are younger than other children in the child welfare system, are more likely to be the victims of severe and chronic neglect, are from families with more problems overall, and are more likely than other children to be placed in foster care. <sup>6</sup>
- Children whose parents abuse drugs and alcohol are almost three times likelier to be physically or sexually assaulted and more than four times likelier to be neglected than children of parents who are not substance abusers. <sup>7</sup>
- Children of substance abusing parents are more likely to have problems with delinquency, poor school performance, emotional difficulties i.e. aggressive behavior and hyperactivity than peers whose parents do not abuse alcohol and other drugs. <sup>8</sup>
- Children prenatally exposed to drugs and alcohol represent only a small portion of the children affected and potentially endangered by prenatal substance abuse. Of children prenatally exposed to drugs, most studies find that approximately 10 to 20 percent enter foster care around the time of birth and that about a third do so within a few years. <sup>9</sup>
- Women who stay in comprehensive treatment longer than three months were more likely to remain alcohol and drug free- 68 percent vs. 48 percent-compared to those who left within the first three months of treatment. <sup>10</sup>
- Treatment Programs geared towards parents and their children demonstrate that many clients can and do improve their lives and many are able to resume their parenting roles. <sup>11</sup>
- Families involved in the child welfare system and alcohol and drug treatment systems are often receiving services from other public institutions (e.g.. social services and probation). <sup>12</sup>

- Health care costs and related services for children and adults who suffer Fetal Alcohol Syndrome amount to \$2 billion; Hospital costs for newborns whose mothers abused illegal drugs amount to \$360 million.<sup>13</sup>
- States spent a stunning \$81.3 billion in 1998 to deal with the issue of substance abuse, 13.1% of their budgets. Just 4% of the amount spent, or \$ 3 billion, went towards prevention and treatment programs.<sup>14</sup>
- The success of state collaborative efforts will affect millions of families and children, and the potential savings in resources repay the investment needed. For every dollar spent for substance abuse treatment services, \$7 to \$11 are saved in social costs such as reduction in health costs, violence and crime, lost work and school productivity, and social services.<sup>15</sup>

## Source

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